MOOD AND URGENCY EFFECTS ON ACTIVATION OF ALCOHOL COGNITIONS

Hayley R. Treloar

Dr. Denis McCarthy, Thesis Advisor

ABSTRACT

Mood states influence many aspects of human behavior, including decisions to drink alcohol. Alcohol-related cognitions have been shown to be activated by positive and negative mood states (Birch, Stewart, & Zack, 2006), and are important determinants of alcohol use (Goldman, Darkes, & Del Boca). Therefore, activation of alcohol cognitions in response to extreme mood states may be one mechanism by which mood influences drinking decisions. Furthermore, studies have shown that the effect of mood on drinking decisions can be moderated by individual differences in motives or personality (Birch et al, 2008; Grant, Stewart, & Birch, 2007). Although impulsivity is one of the strongest predictors of drinking behavior (see Sher, Trull, Bartholow, & Vieth, 1999, for a review), it had not been tested as a moderator of this process. In two studies, we tested whether activation of alcohol cognitions following mood induction would differ depending on individual differences in a specific component of impulsivity, urgency. We tested the effect of mood on positive alcohol associations in general using the Implicit Association Test (Study 1) and as a function of expectancy content domains using the Expectancy Accessibility Task (Study 2). Overall, our results suggest that negative but not positive mood states can activate general positive alcohol associations in memory and that this effect is moderated by individual differences in urgency. Specificity of the effect of mood on different expectancy domains was not supported.